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Israeli forces kill three journalists among 11 in Gaza

Reporters Without Borders says Israeli troops killed as many as 29 Palestinian journalists in past 12 months

CAIRO: In a serious violation of the US-sponsored ceasefire in Gaza on Wednesday, Israeli troops killed 11 Palestinians, three of them journalists, including a freelancer who regularly contributed for *AFP*, local medics said.

In a statement, the civil defence said the bodies of the three journalists killed in the Israeli air strike in the Al-Zahra area, southwest of Gaza City, were transported to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah.

It named the dead as Mohammed Salah Qashta, Abdul Raouf Shaat and Anas Ghneim.

Shaat regularly contributed to the AFP as a photo and video journalist, but at the time of the Israeli air strike he was not on assignment for the agency.

Palestinian health officials said the three Palestinian journalists were travelling in a car when Israel carried out the air strike.

The three journalists were on an assignment sponsored by the Egyptian Committee, which supervises Egypt's relief work in Gaza, to film tent encampments built by Egypt for displaced Palestinians, other local journalists said.

An Egyptian security source confirmed the vehicle belonged to the committee but gave no further details. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Media watchdog Reporters Without Borders said that Israeli forces killed at least 29 Palestinian journalists in Gaza between December 2024 and December 2025.

The deadliest single attack was a so-called "double-tap" strike on a hospital in south Gaza on August 25, which killed five journalists, including two contributors to international news agencies *Reuters* and the *Associated Press*.

Israel and Hamas have traded blame for multiple breaches of the October truce after two years of war that devastated Gaza and caused a humanitarian disaster, and remain at odds over the next steps in US President Donald Trump's 20-point peace plan.

Earlier on Wednesday, Palestinian medics said three people, including a 10-year-old boy, were killed as a result of Israeli tank shelling east of Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza. Two others, a boy of 13 and a woman, were killed in two Israeli shooting incidents in Khan Younis in Gaza's south, they said.

Three other Palestinians were killed in other Israeli shootings across the coastal enclave, taking Wednesday's death toll to at least 11, the health ministry of Gaza said.

Residents said the two incidents occurred in Palestinian-controlled areas. The ceasefire brought about a partial Israeli military withdrawal, leaving Israeli forces holding about 53 per cent of the enclave, but they have been gradually expanding their presence in recent weeks, leading to further displacement of Palestinian families, residents said.

There was also no immediate Israeli military comment on the two incidents.

Earlier on Wednesday, it claimed in a statement that Israeli forces had killed a "terrorist" who entered an area under their control, posing an imminent threat to soldiers operating there.

Trump plan not progressing

The US-brokered October deal has not progressed beyond the first-phase ceasefire, under which major fighting stopped, some Israeli forces pulled back, and Hamas freed Israeli prisoners in return for Palestinian prisoners.

Under future phases whose details have yet to be hammered out, Hamas is supposed to disarm, Israeli forces withdraw further and an internationally backed administration installed to rebuild the ruined, densely-populated territory.

But no timetable has been set to implement the plan.

Trump was due on Thursday to preside over a ceremony celebrating the Board of Peace, a group he formed with the stated goal of redeveloping the coastal enclave.

Israel says it can only move into the second phase after Hamas hands over the remains of the last Israeli prisoner.

On Wednesday, Hamas Gaza spokesperson Hazem Qassem said the Palestinian group had shared all information it had on the body of the last Israeli prisoner and searched for it but in vain, blaming Israeli military obstruction.

Israeli forces have killed at least 466 Palestinians in Gaza since the ceasefire took effect, according to the Palestinian health ministry.—Agencies

ISRAELI military vehicles drive past destroyed buildings in the Gaza Strip after Wednesday's latest strikes.—Reuters

Delhi's move on IWT threatens stability, Pakistan warns UN

Slams 'weaponisation of water', urges world to recognise water insecurity as a systemic global risk

By Anwar Iqbal

WASHINGTON: Pakistan has warned that India's unilateral decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in abeyance has created an unprecedented crisis for Pakistan's water security and regional stability.

Calling the move deliberate "weaponisation of water", Pakistan's representative to the United Nations Ambassador Usman Jadoon said India's actions amounted to material breaches of the landmark 1960 treaty.

Speaking at the Global Water Bankruptcy Policy Roundtable, hosted by Canada and the United Nations University on Tuesday, Ambassador Jadoon said that India had committed several serious violations of the treaty, including unannounced disruptions of downstream water flows and the withholding of critical hydrological data, since April 2025.

"Pakistan's position is unequivocal; the treaty remains legally intact and permits no unilateral suspension or modification," he said.

He stressed that for more than six decades, the Indus Waters Treaty had provided a time-tested framework for the equitable and predictable management of the Indus River basin, which sustains one of the world's largest contiguous irrigation systems.

The basin, he noted, provides over 80 per cent of Pakistan's agricultural water needs and supports the lives and livelihoods of more than 240 million people.

Ambassador Jadoon said water insecurity had emerged globally as a systemic risk, affecting food production, energy systems, public health, livelihoods, and human security.

"For Pakistan, this is a lived reality," he said, describing the country as a semi-arid, climate-vulnerable, lower-riparian state facing floods, droughts, accelerated glacier melt, groundwater depletion, and rapid population growth — all of which are placing immense pressure on already stressed water systems.

Highlighting Pakistan's response, he said the country was strengthening water resilience through integrated planning, flood protection, irrigation rehabilitation, groundwater replenishment, and ecosystem restoration.

He cited initiatives such as 'Living Indus' and 'Recharge Pakistan' as key national efforts. However, he emphasized that systemic water risks could not be managed by any country in isolation, particularly in shared river basins.

Predictability, transparency, and cooperation in trans-boundary water governance, he said, were matters of survival for downstream populations.

Ambassador Jadoon further called for water insecurity to be formally recognised as a systemic global risk in the lead-up to the 2026 UN Water Conference, urging that cooperation and respect for international water law be placed at the center of shared water governance to ensure real protection for vulnerable downstream communities.

Trump, Iran vow war in response to assassination threats

WASHINGTON: In a heated exchange of threats, Iran and the United States have threatened broadscale wars if the leaders of either country are assassinated.

"I have very firm instructions. Anything happens, they're going to wipe them off the face of this earth," Trump said in a *News Nation* interview in response to a question on Iran's direct warning to the US leader.

Earlier on Tuesday, in response to any threats facing Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iranian General Abolfazl Shekarchi was quoted as saying Trump already knew Tehran would not hold back if the tables were turned.

"Trump knows that if a hand of aggression is extended toward our leader, we will not only sever that hand, and this is not a mere slogan," Shekarchi was quoted as telling Iranian state media.

"But we will set their world on fire and leave them no safe haven in the region."

Trump had issued a similar warning to Iran a year ago, shortly after returning to the White House, when he told reporters "if they do it, they get obliterated".

Iran blamed the US and Israel for the deadly violence under the cover of protests against inflation.

Rights groups are working to confirm the number of deaths during the protests, with the Human Rights Activists News Agency putting the toll around 4,000. The Norway-based Iran Human Rights NGO has said verification of deaths in the crackdown remains severely hampered due to the communication restrictions, but noted on Monday that available information "indicates that the number of protesters killed may exceed even the highest media estimates".—AFP

India-held Kashmir police 'intimidate' journalists

Seek 'peace' pledge from reporters

SRINAGAR: Police in India-held Kashmir have been asking journalists working in the region to sign a pledge vowing not to "disturb peace" in the region, two of them told *Reuters* on Wednesday.

An assistant editor with *The Indian Express*, one of the country's most respected dailies, was summoned to a police station in Srinagar, the capital of the federal territory, four times between Jan 15 and 19.

Officers asked the journalist to sign the pledge on Jan 16, the newspaper reported on Wednesday. The journalist did not sign the document.

"He has not signed the bond as asked by the police," Raj Kamal Jha, the paper's chief editor, said. "*The Indian Express* is committed to doing what is necessary to uphold and protect the rights and dignity of its journalists."

Two other journalists told *Reuters* they had also been summoned. One was travelling and the other did not go to the police station. Both declined to be identified because of the sensitive nature of the issue.

Profiling of mosques

The journalists and *The Indian Express* said the summons were issued after they reported that police in the region were seeking information from mosques regarding their funding, management and budgets.

A spokesperson for Srinagar police did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Press Club of Kashmir, an association of journalists in the region, said in a statement that several of its members had been summoned or advised by police to stop covering stories on the profiling of religious institutions.

"Using police powers to summon journalists over their legitimate reporting is part of a pattern of intimidation against the media in Jammu and Kashmir," said Kunal Majumder, coordinator for the CPJ Asia-Pacific Programme, a non-profit that advocates for press freedom.

India has imposed several restrictions in the troubled Muslim-majority region since revoking its constitutional autonomy in 2019, laying out rules for how the insurgency is covered.

An anti-India insurgency that began in 1989 has killed tens of thousands of people in Indian Kashmir, though violence has since ebbed. India and neighbouring Pakistan have fought two wars over Kashmir. Both control parts of the region but claim it in its entirety. —Reuters

EU commission pledges 126m euros for Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan

UNHCR projects displaced population will cross 136m by end of this year

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The European Commission has allocated 126 million euros to address humanitarian needs in Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan during 2026, part of an initial 1.9 billion euro aid budget aimed at combating global crises as major donors cut funds.

The allocation comes at a time when 239m people require assistance, the commission said in a press release on Wednesday. Additionally, more than 415m euros has been reserved for responding to sudden-onset emergencies and maintaining a strategic supply chain.

EC Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management Hadja Lahbib took this commitment to the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos to seek private sector finance and innovative solutions that can complement public funding.

"The humanitarian system is under unprecedented strain, and public funding alone will not meet the scale of the crisis," Lahbib said.

"Europe is taking action, committing an initial €1.9bn for 2026. As the largest humanitarian donor, we are taking our political responsibility and leading the global response."

Together with the WEF, Lahbib will co-host an event on "New Alliances in Aid and Development" . The commission noted the EU and its member states remain the leading global humanitarian aid donor.

Displaced population

Meanwhile, the UNHCR said in its "2025 Impact Report" that it responded to a complex mix of new emergencies and long-standing crises in 2025 that forced millions from their homes.

By the end of June 2025, an estimated 117.3m people were forcibly displaced worldwide, a five per cent decrease compared to the end of 2024. However, global projections indicate that the number of forcibly displaced, returnees and stateless people could reach 136.3m by the end of 2026.

The UN refugee agency said severe funding cuts affected every aspect of its work, including emergency response, forcing the organisation to reduce both the scale of its activities and its workforce by one-third. According to the agency, the need for international solidarity has reached a critical point. Without increased and flexible funding, the UNHCR's ability to respond rapidly at the onset of new crises will be severely hit at a time when needs are escalating.

FCC reserves verdict on case related to ban on imports from India

• Commerce ministry challenges set of LHC directions despite upholding of SROs • Policy decision linked to country's national interest, Kashmir stance
• Govt official's counsel terms high court orders 'judicial overreach' into executive domain, says foreign policy issues traditionally regarded as 'non-justiciable'

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) on Wednesday reserved its ruling on the federal government's challenge to a set of directions issued by the Lahore High Court (LHC) concerning the prohibition on imports from India.

Headed by Justice Aamer Farooq, a three-judge FCC bench, also comprising Justice Ali Baqar Najafi and Justice Rozi Khan Barrech, took up an appeal filed by the commerce ministry against the Jan 26, 2024 LHC judgement.

The petition was earlier filed before the Supreme Court but after the passage of the 27th Amendment, the case was transferred to the FCC for hearing.

Issued by the federal government under its constitutional and statutory authority, the import ban was imposed through statutory regulatory orders (SROs) Nos 927 and 928(I)/2019, reflecting considerations of foreign policy, national security and sovereign discretion.

Through these SROs, imports from and exports to India were banned for all kinds of goods, including books and journals.

The controversy arose when the SROs were challenged before the LHC with the contention that these regulatory orders, to the extent of banning the import of books from India, were ultra vires the Constitution.

Validity of SROs upheld

Although the LHC upheld the validity of the SROs by declaring them intra vires the Constitution and the relevant statutory framework, it nonetheless issued certain directions to the federal government.

The LHC directed the federal government to appoint an officer to consider a review or revision of the policy. It also ordered the federal government to ensure that it considered and decided the officer's recommendations.

One of the directions suggested that the officer should be appointed within the next two months by the commerce ministry and that the appointment should be posted on its website. The petitioners, if so advised, were to file their reviews thereafter.

These directions, despite affirming the legality of the policy, were challenged before the FCC as being beyond the permissible scope of judicial review.

In its petition, the federal government pleaded before the FCC that it was competent to ban one or all goods, or a class of goods, from any one country or from worldwide sources.

It also argued that India was neither an authority in any field of knowledge nor enjoyed a monopoly over wisdom.

It added that as such, banning imports from India, including books or journals, did not infringe any fundamental rights of the respondents.

The petition also stated that the suspension of trade with India was taken in the context of Pakistan's national interest and its longstanding stance on Kashmir.

'Judicial overreach'

Appearing on behalf of the revenue division secretary, Advocate Hafiz Ahsaan Ahmad Khokhar argued that the Jan 26, 2024 LHC judgement was legally unsustainable to the extent that it issued directions after upholding the validity of the SROs.

He contended that once the policy decision embodied in the SROs had been affirmed, any further directions amounted to judicial overreach and encroachment upon the executive domain.

The counsel argued that matters relating to trade restrictions, import prohibitions and regulation of commerce with hostile or adversarial foreign states fell squarely within the exclusive domain of the executive under the constitutional scheme.

He emphasised that issues touching upon foreign policy and external relations were traditionally regarded as non-justiciable, and that courts were required to exercise judicial restraint unless a clear violation of the Constitution or fundamental rights was established.

The counsel further contended that constitutional courts were mandated to adjudicate legality and constitutionality, not to issue directions requiring the federal government to revisit, reconsider or reformulate policy decisions.

Such directions, he argued, violated the doctrine of separation of powers enshrined in the Constitution and blurred the constitutionally demarcated boundaries between the judiciary and the executive.

Additionally, Additional Attorney General Chaudhry Aamir Rehman, appearing on behalf of the federation, submitted that the impugned judgement was not legally sustainable. He stated that the LHC had gone beyond its jurisdiction by interfering in policy matters, which courts were constitutionally barred from doing so.

He added that allowing such directions would amount to judicial encroachment into the executive domain, rendering the judgement legally unsustainable.

After hearing arguments from both sides, the FCC reserved its judgement.

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